



**DAVID HOSACK, M.D.**

**1769-1835**

(From a painting by Sully, engraved by Chas. Heath, in "Lives of Eminent American Physicians and Surgeons of the XIXth Century," ed. by Dr. Samuel Gross- Phila.: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1861.)

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## DAVID HOSACK

David Hosack, as Mumford says, "did not belong to the Revolutionary doctors. He came to manhood after the war was over and is to be classed with the new and progressive generation." Yet, coming, as he does, between his preceptor Bard and his own pupil Francis, he lacked, in some measure, the scientific talent of the one and the literary facility of the other; and is now more to be esteemed as the solid, stable surgeon and practitioner, who performed important operations, edited medical journals, wrote profusely, worked hard for necessary reforms, cultivated botany and mineralogy, after the old 18th century tradition, and managed withal, to hold down as many different chairs in the medical faculty as did Nathan Smith at Dartmouth and Bowdoin.

Hosack, the son of a cadet of a Scotch family who had served as an artillery officer in the French war and later settled in America, was born at 44 Franklin Street, New York City, on August 3, 1769. On his mother's side he was of French and English extraction. Prior to entering Columbia College in 1786, he had received a good classical education from various tutors and in 1788, began to study medicine under the surgeon Richard Bayley, but took his actual A.B. degree at Princeton in 1789 and his medical degree at the Pennsylvania Medical College in 1791. Hosack's preceptor Bailey had granted to his pupils the use of a room in the New York Hospital (reopened 1791) for dissecting purposes, and in this way the young student became implicated in the riot known as the "Doctor's Mob." In the ensuing fracas, he was struck on the head by a stone, knocked

senseless and only saved by the kindness of a neighbor, who picked him up and took him home. Upon graduation, he married Catherine Warner, and commenced practice in Alexandria, Virginia, which then had hopes of becoming the capital of the United States. The experiment was brief. His practice soon grew to ample proportions, but the fees (at that time probably less than 25 cents each) amounted to nothing, and, as the prospects of the little town dwindled, he withdrew, in a year's time, to New York. Here he soon concluded that he would need better training to succeed, and leaving his wife and infant with his parents, he sailed for England, spending two years in London and Edinburgh. Upon the night of his arrival in Liverpool, he met Robert Burns at a social gathering and was soon taken up and made much of. He met or saw all the celebrities of the time, cultivated botany with Sir Joseph Banks and others, attended John Hunter's funeral, and communicated a paper to the Royal Society on the mechanism of vision, which was printed in its *Transaction*. On his voyage homeward in 1794, which lasted fifty-three days, typhus broke out on board, and Hosack was immediately launched into practice. One of his fellow travellers was a wealthy brother of Lord Ellenborough who was so impressed with Hosack's abilities that he introduced him to Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, whose physician he became. In 1795, Hosack was offered the chair of botany (*materia medica*) in Columbia College and before the year's end he was busy with an epidemic of yellow fever in the city. It was at this time that he attracted the attention of Samuel Bard, who took him into partnership and to whose practice he eventually succeeded in 1798. Hosack's fortune was thus made at the start. Having lost his wife and child, he married in 1797, Mary Eddy by whom he had nine children. He became a kind of expert in the treatment of yellow fever, which he regarded as a contagious disease. Upon the foundation of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, in 1807, he was appointed professor of botany and *materia medica*, later succeeding to the chair of surgery and midwifery, and, upon the fusion of the College of Physicians and Surgeons with the Columbia College School

(1811) he succeeded to the chair of practice and clinical medicine, thus holding six different chairs in nineteen years (1807-26). In 1801 he founded the Elgin Botanical Garden at Hyde Park, which he eventually presented to the College. He was also instrumental in the foundation of the Humane Society, in the remodelling of the City Dispensary, and gave medical lectures to policemen. In 1810 he founded, with Dr. John W. Francis, the *Medical and Philosophical Register* (4 vols., 1810-14), one of the best medical journals of the period. In 1829 he retired from practice, living thereafter at his country house at Hyde Park. Just before his retirement from practice, Hosack married for a third time, and during his six remaining years, his new wife, an amiable widow, continued the tradition of his Saturday evening receptions, at which Irving, Cooper, Bryant, Halleck and other celebrities of the time were frequent guests. Harriet Martineau has left an enthusiastic description of this pleasant Hudson retreat. Like Samuel Bard, Hosack was a scientific farmer and stock raiser, occupied with these avocations until his death of apoplexy in December, 1835.

Hosack's reputation in medicine was based upon his success with the sudorific or mild treatment of yellow fever during the eight epidemics of 1795-8, 1803, 1805, 1819, 1822, upon his eighteenth century predilection for botany, his industry as writer and editor, and his innovations in surgery, notably the treatment of hydrocele by injection (1795), the first American ligation of the femoral artery for aneurism (1808) and his persistent advocacy of the open air treatment of wounds (1813). His *Medical Essays* (3 volumes, New York, 1824) include observations of the nature of contagion, on yellow fever, on foetal and infantile diseases, on angina pectoris, anthrax, elephantiasis, goitre, gout, tetanus, with biographies of Caspar Wistar, and Hugh Williamson, essays on ancient surgery, medical police, Ballston Spa, and suchlike; but nothing of outstanding importance save the Royal Society memoir on vision (1794) and the ligation of the femoral (1808). In the *American Medical and Philosophical Register* (1814-19), edited by Hosack and Francis, we find Hosack's classification of diseases, his history of the medical schools of

New York and Philadelphia, his observations on croup and hydrophobia, and such suggestive titles as fever in the drowned lands of Orange County, N. Y., and proofs of the contagion of yellow fever in the pure air of the country. That the two editors were informed with the historic spirit is evidence by an autograph letter of Franklin in facsimile and the editorial gossip, from which a picture of the medical culture of the time might be easily constructed. On the historic side, Hosack's best book is perhaps his "System of Practical Nosology" (1818), which, like Wunderlich's History of Medicine, gives the different classifications of diseases made by physicians of the 18th century, from Linnæus and Sauvages to Young and Pinel. His treatise on the Theory and Practice of Physic, edited by Ducachet, was published after his death, in 1838.

Sully's painting of Hosack shows a sturdy, vigorous, dark-eyed, blunt-nosed figure of Scottish type, whose lawn stock is folded in the fashion of the Geneva bands worn by physicians in the eighteenth century. His rugged feature tells something of the kindly hospitality and generous nature which distinguished alike his public benefactions, his silent acts of charity, and the conversaciones held every Saturday evening at his house. If he had latent in his composition anything of

"The thick Scots wit that flatters, scolds, defies,

The braw Scots tongue that fells you like a mace,"

it was not apparent in any known transaction of his life. As a teacher of medicine, he had a sonorous, vivacious, expressive delivery, which relieved the usual monotonies of medical lecturing, and so won his pupils. Three times in his life he took friendless young men into his home and educated them. All came up to expectations, one a voluntary martyr to the care of yellow fever patients in the epidemic of 1798, another, at first an indifferent student, later a clergyman of means; the third no less than Professor Delile, of the School of Medicine at Montpellier and Superintendent of its Jardin des Plantes. Hosack's son, Dr. Alexander Eddy Hosack (1805-71) whose memory is preserved in Hosack Hall in the Academy of Medicine, was a capable surgeon. This success with the young bespeaks the physician

of Osler type as plainly as the Elgin Botanic Garden, the Fever Hospital, the cabinet of minerals donated to Princeton College and the many other charitable and public-spirited actions which honored Hosack's professional career.

F. H. GARRISON

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## THE WESLEY M. CARPENTED LECTURE ON SEROLOGICAL REACTIONS IN SYPHILIS

BY THORWALD MADSEN

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(Delivered before The New York Academy of Medicine, October 16, 1924)

Among the many aids which laboratory investigations have of late years placed at the disposal of the doctor and the hygienist, the serodiagnostic reactions in syphilis are among the most prominent. This does not only apply to the specialist, the syphilologist, who both utilizes the reaction for a purely diagnostic purpose in recognizing the disease, and also to follow its further course and to obtain proofs of the result of the treatment. As a matter of fact, access to this reaction has been of greater importance to the clinic than perhaps is always realized.

The fact is that in various hospital sections the regular serodiagnostic examination of the blood for syphilis has been introduced between the routine examinations which are made of all patients; this is true for instance of maternity homes, children's homes, etc. It is therefore clear that it is of the greatest importance that access to having this important reaction made be arranged in the best possible manner. In this respect, however, the various countries have gone very differently to work. In most places access to these examinations has been allowed to arrange itself, and the result is that besides the excellent, first-class diagnosing stations of this kind, there are, unfortunately, many others which leave very much to be desired and where the reaction is proceeded with less conscientiously. It is therefore no wonder that complaints are heard time after time about